

THE OLD WORK IN OLD WAYS:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE

SIXTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

Society for the Advancement of Christianity
in Pennsylvania,

JANUARY 8, 1877.

BY

THE REV. HENRY J. MORTON, D.D.,
RECTOR OF ST. JAMES.

Ledger Job Print, Philadelphia.

CORRESPONDENCE.

ST. PAUL'S RECTORY, CHESTNUT HILL,
PHILADELPHIA, *March 8th, 1877.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR :

At a meeting of the Trustees of "The Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania," held on March 5th, 1877, it was

"*Resolved*, That the Rev. Mr. Harris, and Messrs. Morris and Littell, be a Committee to request from the Rev. Dr. Morton a copy for publication of the Sermon delivered by him before the Society at the late Anniversary."

I have great pleasure, in accordance with the above resolution, in requesting the favor of a copy of said Sermon for publication,

And am, dear Sir,

Very respectfully yours,

J. A. HARRIS,

For the Committee.

THE REV. HENRY J. MORTON, D.D.

PHILADELPHIA, *March 10th, 1877.*

REVEREND J. A. HARRIS, MESSRS. MORRIS and LITTELL.

GENTLEMEN:—It gives me great pleasure to comply with the request of the Trustees of the Society for the Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania.

Though the Sermon asked for was written hastily, amid pressing duties, it was written with the hope that it might be useful, and I am happy that the Trustees deem it worthy of publication.

Very truly yours,

H. J. MORTON.

SERMON:

"For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing."—ACTS xviii., 21.

It is needless to say to this congregation, that the Athenians formed part of a great people. Their city stood like a beacon-light, blazing over the darkness of surrounding barbarism. Its architectural glories, even in their present state of ruin, rise in majesty before the eye of the traveller, and, like some storm-rifted snowy peaks of an Alpine range, fill the mind with mingled emotions of admiration and awe. Its statuary is the inspiration and emulation of modern art. The intellectual glory of its poets, orators and philosophers, shines with familiar lustre through the schools of the nineteenth century; and much of modern thought, expressing itself in living tongues, is obviously only the echo of sentiments which once flowed out in the rich cadence of Attic utterances.

The Greeks were, indeed, a great nation. Athens was a noble city; and we wonder not that St. Paul was willing to be "left there alone," amid its monuments of taste and talent, though his spirit was stirred up within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

But the inhabitants of that great metropolis had other failings beside devotion to a pantheistic creed: they were carried away with a mastering desire for novelty. The apostle, in the passage quoted as a text, points out this peculiarity. Their own great orator charges them with the same folly. They wanted some newer thing. (the apostle employs the comparative degree). It was not merely a love of gossip; an itching ear for trivial novelties, but a desire for fresh philosophies. New divinities were craved for their Parthenon, or its precincts; and if an

"Unknown God" seemed to be wandering that way, he had his "altar" and his "worship."

Had the counsel of God by his holy prophet Jeremiah been addressed to them, "Stand ye in ways, and ask for the old paths," (vi. 16) they would probably have asked, "What does this babler say?" or, as others did when the apostle, reproving their idolatry, they answered, "We will hear thee again of this matter," or departed mocking.

Brethren, we too form part of a great nation; we also have a noble city; but if we fail to equal the Athenians in the glories of architectural grandeur, and in the perfection of poetic and forensic force, we are not a whit behind them in our love of novelty. Not only is our appetite for new fashions and new forms morbid; not only have we itching ears for novel theories and fresh fancies, we have restless souls, seeking new ways of doing things, which were well done as they were done of old; and wearying of work, not because it has failed in its object, but simply because it is familiar in its methods.

We desire progress (as is natural and proper); but we are not content to walk forward by the "king's highway," trodden by many generations, and leading to a certain resting place. We prefer to wander through the passages of a labyrinth, turning now to the right hand and now to the left, which leave the traveller more and more bewildered, and further off than before, from any satisfactory outlet. We have yet to manifest in spiritual things, the wisdom which exhibits itself in material things, and leads men to refuse the "new wine," saying "the old is better." But nature (ever and anon) revenges itself; and, seeking after novelties, we stumble upon the fashions of our forefathers, and rejoice in the newness of things which are very old, and only novel because they have long fallen into disuse, and been thrust aside for a time for fresh innovations.

The society on whose behalf it is my privilege to appear this evening, is a striking illustration of the truth asserted. We celebrate at this time its sixty-fifth anniversary. It is, therefore, a time-honored organization. My first recollections of ministerial work are associated with its early history; and as memory travels back over by-gone years, the venerable forms of its founders and original friends rise before me and inspire reverence. I see them now—that noble father of our church—so learned and yet so simple; so gentle, and yet so resolute; so bent in form, and yet so ~~great~~ in spirit. His name, the name of the Rt. Rev. William White, is a "household word," honored in all the churches, and esteemed by all whose respect is valuable. The memory of his confidence and affection is among the richest legacies bestowed upon me,

and more and more valued as days lengthen. Those good men too who labored with him—who labored with him here, and now rest with him there! Those willing hands that carried out the counsels of wise heads; those liberal hearts which opened freely, while yet they throbbed with life, and left behind them legacies for the society's use; which seem to me so many voices from their marble tombs, speaking, like the faith of dead Abel, and testifying to a "more excellent sacrifice" than offerings made for mere temporal objects. All these rise up in the background of by-gone years, and reveal a "torch-light procession," not of bearers of smoking lamps, filled with earthly oil, but blazing with the light of spiritual lustre! Recollections come to me of earnest, active, glowing interest in laymen; of crowded churches on anniversaries; of meetings largely attended, of constant, energetic efforts. These were the early evidences of the interest of the members of this society. Their zeal flowed forth as a river, and, despite the hindrances to travel, caused by stations in almost pathless wildernesses (there were no railroads then); the missionaries crossed mountains and floods, and a good report was brought back by those who went out "to spy the land."

Where is that tide of zeal and liberality now? Like some of those streams called "sunken or lost rivers," which, after flowing freely, suddenly sink and disappear, or only make their way sluggishly through wide-spread marshes, the interest which once gave life and motion to the efforts of the society, has almost disappeared. Nay, for a while, one part of the work was reluctantly abandoned. The missionary field was deserted. The duty of sending forth laborers into the fields, white with the harvest, was left to other hands.

But as the "lost rivers," of which I just spoke, sometimes start up in unexpected places, and are seen again in familiar flow, so of this society. It has resumed its missionary work; it has undertaken to assist the dioceses of Pittsburgh and Central Pennsylvania, when aid is asked for by the Bishops of those sections of the State; for though these portions of the Commonwealth have been separated from the parent diocese, they still form part of the State, and are not divided from the interests of the society organized for the "Advancement of Christianity in Pennsylvania."

May we not hope that the old channel being again opened, the stream of benevolence resuming its course, will find many tributaries to swell its volume of charitable works? That the old zeal will revive; the old interest be renewed; and the old work thus resumed be vigorously prosecuted? To help forward this desirable result, let me as briefly as pos-

sible (for I dread being tedious) set before you some of the duties which this society desires to discharge.

The first work to which it is pledged, is education. The preparation of young men for the ministry of the gospel. The importance of such preparation needs no lengthened argument. While the primary requisite for the ministry is a broad and deeply laid foundation of piety and serious self-denial, the need of liberal culture must be very obvious. While without devotion to the cause of Christianity, scholarship will produce only learned pedants and scholastic book worms (often as hurtful to the cause as the worms to the parchments), liberal culture, built upon the foundation of faith and love, and having the accompanying qualifications of prudence, tact, temper, and a fair share of natural ability, will prove a priceless benefit. It will make many effective laborers in building up and protecting the spiritual walls on which they are to stand as watchmen and warders.

Infidelity is assaulting the bulwarks of Christian faith. It is making new underground approaches from the side of philosophy and science. It must be countermined, and those who do the work must understand the signs of hostile progress and know how to use the tools of the engineer.

We do not advocate the introduction of philosophies and sciences in ordinary pulpit teachings, but every teacher should be so far informed on these points that he shall be able to give an answer to those who ask a "reason of the hope that is in him with meekness (indeed) and fear," but with a clear understanding of the difficulties suggested by anxious, truth-seeking minds, and those attainable solutions which are appropriate. We want a "zeal of God," but a "zeal according to knowledge."

Infidel science has rolled great stones on the sepulchre of Jesus Christ, and affixed its seals to the place where all man's hopes of another life are laid. Devout science has broken those seals and rolled away those stones, and he who preaches the "resurrection of the dead" should know how the work has been done. It is true, science, infidel or devout, leaves only a dead Christ in the closed or open sepulchre. The resurrection lies outside of the circle of philosophy: it lies in the region of spiritual things, which are only spiritually discerned. But the man who preaches the doctrine should be able to show that the scientific seals have been broken, the scientific stones removed, and that the proclaimed work of the "spirit and power of God" is unimpeded by any assumed contradiction to reason or established law.

• The great defender of the faith in this field of conflict, is the "Apos-

tle to the Gentiles," and he was the most learned of the apostles. The panoply of the Christian soldier has been described by St. Paul, and it is indeed spiritual. "The helmet of salvation; the shield of faith; the spiritual girdle; the spiritual sandals; the sword of the spirit." The apostle wore all, bound on him by the strong ligature of "supplication and prayer." Yet how anxious he seems for those books and parchments, left (no doubt inadvertently) at Troas.

When we look at his fellow apostles, we find them, it is true, unlearned men; but we find them miraculously endowed men, furnished by the Holy Ghost with "words of wisdom" which all their adversaries were unable to gainsay or resist. They could also do mighty works; and the learning of the schools might well be dispensed with by Him who could say to the impotent cripple, "rise up and walk;" and to the dead Dorcas, "Tabitha, arise;" and to the palsied "Eneas," Jesus Christ "maketh thee whole." But these supernatural gifts are no longer allowed; and we must therefore depend upon God's blessing, on prudence, diligence, and sufficient learning. Hence, looking at the noble defenders of the faith, who have lived and died since the days of the apostles, we find an "army," not only of "martyrs," but of master minds, full of the treasures of varied learning, as well as of piety, and thus "thoroughly furnished" for the work in hand. Any man can steer a boat in a calm. He need not indeed touch the helm. But when the storm is on the sea, and the waves are leaping up against the trembling sides of the vessel, and a lee shore is looming behind breakers, it needs skilful seamen to manage tack and sheets, and a steady master to pilot the ship and escape a wreck. But the storm is to-day raging. The four winds of science, philosophy, faith and charity, are striving in the great deep of public opinion, and we want men who can save the Church from foundering.

Exact scholarship is also of great importance; and though most of us can only admire and envy the deep learning which some of our brethren possess and employ, all must see its exceeding value, and desire to secure a good degree of it for those who are to interpret God's word and teach the people. History, too, has rich stores, which may be gathered for sacred use; and though the treasury of God is greatly augmented by the widow's two mites of faith and love, it needs also the rich man's gold of liberal learning.

What the Church at this time needs, is not so much more laborers, as more skilled laborers; men who love their work and know how to do it; men in whom the love of Christ is a mastering feeling; who are ready

and resolved to spend and be spent in the cause, and who do not come into the ranks of the ministry to receive, but to give; not expecting or seeking emolument or worldly position, and a better place in society than their present status promises or other professions offer, but who come to give; to lay on the altar of God freely all the results of laborious study, and steady self-denial and warm affections. To give God their honest, earnest labors; their best years; their lives; "themselves, souls and bodies, to be living sacrifices."

These men the Church needs. A few such would help her greatly; more than a crowd of half-hearted and half-furnished servants. It is the disciplined columns of the army that win the fight—not the crowd of camp followers. Now it is to supply these demands of the day, that this society labors; seeking to give the advantages of a thorough training to those of whose piety and ability it has reasonable evidence. It were well, I think, if such efforts on the part of the Church were only occasionally needed. If men already taught in all useful learning more frequently presented themselves for theological teaching; if the able lawyer and skilled physician, and man of thorough literary culture and acquaintance with men, came and asked for the Church's training. We have had noble examples of such applications.

It were well, also, if men came forward in whom the love of Christ was so strong, and self-denial so sincere, that they had wrested the preparatory learning needed from the hard hand of unfriendly fate, and by their own self-denial and diligence had obtained, what others gain by an easy routine of school and college exercises, paid for by parents and guardians. These would be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, able "to endure hardness," and ready to go wherever sent, no matter how stony the soil which required their labor.

But, occasionally, real piety and real ability are so pressed down by poverty and other impediments, that they must be helped, if it is hoped they may be employed in the service of the Church. To such the society extends its aid, and, under the supervision of bishops, pastors, and appointed teachers, the candidates are prepared for orders, and finally ordained.

Having thus made them ready (so far as human instrumentality can avail), the society aids to support the missionaries, called and stationed by the bishops of the several dioceses. It works under Episcopal authority. It is not a wheel within a wheel, working backward while the outer disk works forward; but part of a machine, where all moves harmoniously, and is regulated by what engineers call "the governor."

Shall I dwell at any length on the importance of this part of the society's work? Of the need that exists of helping the heads of the Church to fulfill the divinely designated duty, and send laborers into the harvest; trying to do what they pray God help them to do? But how shall they send if they have not men to go; and how shall men go if there is not the means to sustain them? The laborer is not only worthy of his hire, but must have it—if he is to eat and live! The missionary is not ordinarily an overpaid laborer. His "penny a day" is not a profuse expenditure. It hardly averages the pay of an unskilled workman; and often when the "evening" comes he is not called to receive his wages—A penny a day, and that not paid! His struggles to sustain himself and family are often (to my certain knowledge) pathetic. I feel ashamed of my own comforts, when I think of the privations to which worthier men, working in the same field, are exposed. My consolation is that I can help them occasionally, and that their greater faith and larger self-denial will find in the end a fuller recompense.

But, well paid or ill paid, they are wanted, and must be sent, if they are to be had; and it is a good work to assist in sending them. It is a good and divinely ordered work, to send the heralds of the cross, to uplift the cross on hills and plains; to lift it high; to make it tower above obelisk and pyramid, above forge and factory, and every other sign of human necessity or earthly hope.

It is a good work (though a familiar one) to send out the life-boat, well manned, with Christ resting on a pillow in the after part of the ship, when the storm is high and vessels freighted with souls are sinking or falling among the quicksands. There are many newer things—newer ways of working for the improvement of society. Politics has its plans; law has its legitimate labors. Philosophy, so called, is prolific in schemes for the regeneration of our race; but the old way is the best way. To teach men that they have souls to save, and an account to give to the Judge of all the Earth, and a final reward or retribution, adjusted to the merits of their present doings, to leaven the sour mass of "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," which is seething in society, and fomenting strife, and political discord and deeds of violence; to leaven it, I say, with the love of Christ, and anticipations of judgment; for thus only shall despised labor be made honorable, and contentment with one's hard lot practicable, and law endowed with its legitimate aspect of venerable authority, and the fierceness of political strife be abated, and the cold, icy tide of selfishness (frozen into a solid mass of indifference to the rights and needs of others) be melted and

made to flow forth in streams of benevolence and Christian bountifulness. Thus shall the desert be made to blossom as a rose, and the lion and leopard to lie down together, and a "little child," without the iron hand of the law, with tender fingers of love, enabled to lead them.

Therefore I say to the political Athenians; to the communist Athenians; to the chartist Athenians; to the infidel Athenians of every school, going about and asking for "some new thing;" some novel method of ameliorating the miseries of a morbid society, "turn to the old paths; seek no new deities; build no altars to Unknown Gods" (whose presence may be marked, as of old, by plague and pestilence); but go to Him who has already shown, that by His gospel of love and spirit of grace, He can change the persecutor into the preacher of righteousness; make contending men of one heart and one mind; unselfish to the degree of "calling nothing their own;" "ready to do good, glad to distribute;" sympathising with all sorrow, ministering to all necessities, and extorting from a captious crowd the reluctant exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another." Now it is the object of the society to apply this old, effective cure, for prevailing disorders.

I hardly feel willing (and perchance find you loath) to pass from this absorbing subject to that object of the society which consists in helping to build or repair churches. But the matter is one of great moment. If two or three, or many, are to be gathered together in Christ's name, to enjoy Christ's promised presence, they must have some place to meet in, and it is obviously proper that the place should be appropriate; that they should have a house of prayer which, in its outward aspect, shall appear a place of worship, not a barn or brewery; and in its inward features a Christian Church, not a concert hall or lyceum. I would not unduly magnify the importance of suitable structures for religious uses. This may easily be done. More may be thought of the outward adorning of the sanctuary, than of the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit in the worshippers. Yet we may err in an opposite direction, and act as if any place, however unsightly, was good enough for God, and rest content with sacred edifices which we should despise as places devoted to secular purposes. But I remember that God gave great weight to this matter, when he ordered the details of the temple services, and accepted the magnificent house which Solomon had built to His name; filling it with a visible cloud of glory.

St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Hebrews, that God showed Moses in the Mount the "patterns" of the Tabernacle, which he would have erected in the wilderness, designating even the flower-forms which

were to be copied in the golden candlesticks, and the substance and adornment of the sacred altar (Exodus xx., 24-5): and we are told that by "His spirit" Solomon was instructed as to the fashion of portals and treasuries, and upper chambers and mercy seat in the First Temple (1 Chron. xxviii., 12). Why are not the patterns and adornments of His houses of prayer in after days worthy of devout attention? Many things, significant of sacred art, seem to be suggested (may we not say designedly) by the glories of God's material world. The winter sun, rising in splendor behind the eastern woods; now stript of leaves, but rich in sprays, and gemmed with glittering icicles, reflecting prismatic lights, seems to point to the great east window, filled with stained glass. The bare columnar trunks of trees, and upper interlacing branches, point to the "long drawn aisle and fretted vault." The altar-like rock, draped in ferns, and the font-like rock-bason, filled with pure water, as if for sacred rite, carry forward the fancy; while the sound of the wind, sweeping through trembling boughs, is as the voice of living worshippers; and all invites to prayer, and all seems counselling praise.

But I will make no appeal to mere sentiment. The simple question reads thus: Is it not a good thing to help build suitable places of prayer, in districts needing such refuges, but unable to erect them? This society attempts no costly structures. It helps those who are trying to help themselves. When a poor parish has taxed itself to the utmost of its ability to rebuild a burned church, or to erect a sacred edifice where it is greatly needed, and is ready to despond for the lack of a few hundred dollars requisite to complete the work, this society comes forward and gives (as it is able) to finish the structure; and the hands that hung down are lifted up, and the feeble knees are strengthened and bend in gratitude to God, who has stirred up Christian hearts to Christian liberality, and thanks come back to those who have gone up "to the help of the Lord" in the day of trial. Is not the society which endeavors to do this work worthy of the sympathy and support of Churchmen?

To educate young men for the ministry; to send them forth, when ordained, to labor where the bishop wishes them to work; to help struggling congregations to keep their old churches in repair, or build others in places needing them; to assist, in like manner, parishes anxious to provide parsonages. These are the main objects of the society; and, in behalf of these objects, the liberality of this congregation is appealed to to-night.

I am told that not much dependence is placed on these "anniversary collections." I do not know why, unless it is that recent experience has

proved that such dependence would prove disappointing. But it was not so formerly. The old ways of the Church in this respect were liberal ways. I find four and five hundred dollars recorded as the result of such calls, and money was then worth more than double its present value. The exigencies of the case are increased now by the increased cost of all the necessities of life. What then has become of this tide of liberality which once flowed so freely? Is it a sunken river?

And the kindred associations—those tributary streams—the Bishop White Parish Library Association; the Bishop White Prayer Book Society; the Female Episcopal Tract and Prayer Book Societies. Have we some newer things to hear and tell of that these may be safely neglected?

Brethren, let us begin to answer these questions to-night. Let us show the Managers of the Society for whose cause I plead, that we "esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake," and mean to help them do their work effectively.

I do not point you now to any present recompense of liberality, though recompense is very certain and very great. Peace, established by the "Gospel of Peace," in districts disordered and rendered dangerous by discontented labor; temperance promoted by the Gospel, which enjoins it in all things; Christian intelligence in localities now disgraced by ignorance and indifference to duty; morality among the immoral; reverence among the ungodly and profane; contentment stealing over hearts now disurbed and almost despairing; the sweet tone of the church bell, summoning to fervent prayer and joyful praise, where now is heard only the roar of the great steam whistle calling men, women and children to daily drudgery and distasteful toil. These things rise up before us as we think of what this society can do, if only it be reasonably aided.

But I turn away the eye from all this and ask you to forget for a moment the humanised laborer; the thriftless outlying village helped by the adjacent school and active missionary; the crowds made orderly by Christian constraints, and the hand of violence relaxed by Christian influence. I ask you to look away from all these motives to liberality, and fix your eyes upon one solitary form. It is here in our midst, if God's word is true and we are met together in the name of Christ.

It is the form of a man; the man Christ Jesus. His brow is bleeding; His hands are pierced; things sterner than thorns have penetrated His feet. His side lies opened by a ghastly wound. He looks around sadly; is there none to pity? He looks up sadly; is there none to help the forsaken one? He had no place on earth to lay that bleeding head

—but the grave. The cross was His pillow; the sepulchre His couch. Yet He came from God. He was one with God; but for our sakes He came down to die. To endure before death all that human frame and human soul could suffer of shame and agony. Forsaken of friends, the garden ground felt His blood-sweat fall upon it. The night winds carried His groans over unheeding ears. His great and bitter cry upon the cross, went to a silent Heaven, and was swallowed up in darkness. He died deserted. "Will we also go away?"

If no present benefit come to us from our labors for Him, would not gratitude alone suffice to stir us up to efforts in His behalf? to endeavor to do His will, to satisfy His soul?

And what is His will? What is His desire? That His gospel should be preached to every creature.

We have neglected Him greatly in this matter; we have grieved Him sorely by our apathy in regard to this duty. But He pardons all; He turns to us in pitying love; He looks on us with forgiving eyes; He speaks to us with pathetic voice, and these are His parting words:

"Lovest thou me more than these? Feed my lambs. Lovest thou me? Feed my sheep. Lovest thou me? Feed my sheep. Send not away empty those who have tarried with me fasting, lest they faint by the way."